DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 280 143 EA 019 248

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TITLE Creating a Positive School Climate at the Junior High Level.
PUB DATE Mar 87
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Michigan Association of Middle School Educators (17th, Birmingham, MI, March 19-20, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role; *Change Strategies; *Educational Environment; *Educational Improvement; Educational Philosophy; *Incentives; Innovation; Interpersonal Communication; Junior High Schools; Leadership Responsibility; Middle Schools; Needs Assessment; *School Effectiveness; Statistics; Student Attitudes; Student Motivation; Student Needs; Success; Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Student Relationship
IDENTIFIERS Effective Schools Research; Teacher Expectation Student Achievement

ABSTRACT

One of the seven correlates of an effective school, as identified by the Effective Schools Research, is a positive school climate: a positive attitude on the part of the entire staff and student body exhibited through overt behavior that creates a warm, orderly learning environment. Development of such an environment depends upon: (1) strong administrative leadership; (2) a cooperative, caring, and committed teaching staff; (3) an educational philosophy that stresses the importance of all students; and (4) innovative programs that recognize the self-worth of every student. This paper outlines and describes 26 programs, goals, and ideas for creating a positive school climate that are being implemented successfully in Clarkston (Michigan) Junior High School's School Improvement Project. Some of these strategies include: (1) a school mission that emphasizes that every student will receive at least one success experience during the year; (2) a clear and consistently enforced discipline policy; (3) a lunch with the principal program; (4) a Teacher Advisor Group program; (5) a Student Incentive Program (leading to monetary rewards and/or restaurant gift certificates); (6) special theme weeks; (7) a Student of the Month Program; (8) a week-long camping program; (9) a physical education Green and White Olympics; and (10) staff training in Teacher Expectation Student Achievement (TESA). (IW)

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CREATING A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE AT THE JUNIOR HIGH LEVEL

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EA 019 348

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CREATING A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE AT THE JUNIOR HIGH LEVEL

A few years ago the word "school climate" was not in vogue. Today this particular term is bantered about in journal articles, conferences, and education courses. The Effective Schools Research brought the term to a head when it concluded that a positive school climate was one of the seven correlates of an effective school.

What is a positive school climate? How important is it? An effective school climate is a positive attitude on the part of the entire staff and student body exhibited through their overt behavior that creates a warm, orderly learning environment. As a building level administrator, I cannot think of a more important focus to increase student achievement and, what I call, student approach behavior to school.

Experience has taught me that there is no magic formula that creates this climate overnight. It takes strong leadership on the part of the administration to act as role models, set a climate expectation level, and be willing to take the necessary risks to improve; innovative programs that recognize the self worth of every student; a teaching and support staff that is cooperative, caring and committed to affective education; and lastly, a philosophy that states that kids are very important people.

Clarkston Junior High is not unlike any other middle class suburban junior high school. We house approximately 600 students in grades 7-9 with a traditional selection of requirements and electives. There are two administrators and 31 professional staff members. The facility is old and obviously has some limitations, but it is extremely well kept. Our school climate has never been overly oppressive

or negative; however, we felt that it was important not to keep the status quo, to take some risks and strive for creating an excellent school environment. Currently, we are in the midst of a School Improvement Project that is designed to meet this very need.

The initital reactions from the community, staff and students to our climate activities have been positive. Therefore, let me share some of our more successful ideas with you.

1. A school mission that emphasizes that every student will receive at least one success experience during the year. This mission has been translated into the slogan "Clarkston Junior High-Success for Everyone". Banners are visible in the hallways and in classrooms to help remind all of us of our mission.
2. A discipline philosophy that is very clear and consistently enforced. It is essential that young people understand that when they are disciplined, it is their specific misbehavior that is punished--not them as a person. In most cases this philosophy leads to a behavior change without loss of self-esteem.
3. An adult-student communication style that attempts to catch kids being good, calls students by their first names, and avoids sarcastic comments directed at students. The emphasis on this style was an outgrowth of our School Improvement Project.
4. A lunch with the principals program. Students are nominated by their teachers for good behavior and academic performance. Each student's name is placed on a lunch ticket and via a lottery system 15 different students are selected each month to eat lunch (pizza and pop) with the principals. The intent of the program is to establish a dialogue and reward the student who works hard but does not receive

much school-wide attention.

5. Our Teacher Advisor Group (T.A.G.) program is an attempt to insure that each student has one special adult within the school who knows and accepts him/her. The advisor is intended to be a person who will have the specific assignment of knowing a small group of students throughout the school year and being available to meet with these students on a regular basis. This rationale is based on the belief that personalized attention from the advisor will develop a more positive self-image which in turn contributes to both cognitive and affective development.

6. A Student Incentive Program where 15 students per marking period can win $10.00 each for excellent citizenship, honor roll status, and no discipline referrals. In addition, every student who has perfect attendance and no tardies to class for the marking period receives a free meal certificate from Burger King or McDonald's.

7. Special theme weeks are held throughout the year. This involves an intensified week of study on a relevant social topic for adolescents. Interdisciplinary units are taught in 90% of the classrooms along with special presentations for small groups and school-wide assemblies.

In the 84/85 school year we had an "Alcohol Awareness" week which involved bringing into the school local mental health professionals, representatives from Ala Teen, M.A.D.D., and S.A.D.D. The week climaxed with Crossroads Productions, a professional touring company, putting on the play "One for the Road", a social drama emphasizing the dangers of mixing alcohol and driving.

In the 85/86 school year
This week focused on building
of speakers, movies, activiti
student received a button, an
school for the rest of the ye
talked to students about "Sel
"Resisting Negative Peer Pres
participated. This program s
for the remainder of the scho

8. A Student of the Month progra
who meet certain criteria for
and improvement. Students re
and have their picture taken

9. A week-long camping program
grade students. This is an
the teaching staff. The maj
students aware of their envi
self-confidence, and establi
teaching staff. The camping
year we had upwards of 200 9

10. The Physical Education depar
The 9th grade class is divi
compete in P. E. related co
stars competition. The cul
school fair where the two t
are totaled and the winning

r we had "It's Great To Be Me" week.
g student self-esteem through a series
ies, and discussion groups. Each
nd banners were posted around the
ear emphasizing this theme. Speakers
lf Esteem", "Taking Charge", and
ssure". The entire staff actively
set the positive tone in the building
ool year.

am whereby teachers recommend students
r citizenship, academic performance,
eceive a special T-shirt, certificate,
.

with an ecology theme for all 9th
overnight experience supervised by
or goals of this program are to make
ronment, build student morale, improve
sh an affective relationship with the
program is in its 10th year and last
th graders participate.

tment holds a Green and White Olympics.
ed into a green and white team. They
tests patterned after the TV network
inating contest is the night of the
ams tackle the obstacle course. Points
team receives a trophy.

11. An Activity Day is held once a year where students choose a fun activity to participate in for the entire day (i.e., horseback riding, swimming, assorted fieldtrips, tours, etc.) The staff supervises each activity and has found it to be a positive experience.
12. The administration makes phone calls to the parents of new students by the end of their first week to make sure they are making a good adjustment. Also, new students' pictures are taken and placed in our New Student Showcase.
13. All 9th grade students were surveyed to gather information about the climate of the school. The administration then sat down with a representative cross section of the 9th grade class (24 students) to interpret the results. This information was then shared with the faculty in an all-day meeting. Teachers brainstormed ways to improve the school.
14. High student participation in local, state, and national academic contests. We also provide a wide variety of intramural and interscholastic athletics and academic clubs that meet after school. Student involvement in these activities invariably leads to a positive feeling about his/her school environment.
15. A Building Team that meets weekly to discuss problem students and situations. Diagnostic and prescriptive recommendations are discussed and implemented to meet the needs of these students.
16. A number of staff have been trained in either Cooperative Learning or T. E. S. A. (Teacher Expectation Student Achievement). These progra have made teachers and administrators more aware of how their behavior affects students and the importance of students learning

to cooperate with each other. If used correctly, these programs should create a more positive classroom atmosphere. The second phase of our School Improvement Project calls for the entire staff to be trained in T. E. S. A.

17. Good notes/phone calls are frequently made to parents for students' accomplishments, good grades, and improved behavior.
18. Regular student recognition assemblies are held throughout the year.
19. Positive signs, sayings, and posters appear throughout the school.
20. Student work is placed in the main office.
21. Teachers volunteer their time before and after school and during their conference hours to assist students who are having problems.
22. The counselors run a Student Birthday Club.
23. Gym playnights are held for individual grades. Interested staff and students interact during free gym time in the evening.
24. The administration meets with Student Council on a regular basis. Issues concerning the student body are raised and discussed. Establishing a meaningful dialogue is the main intent.
25. Candid pictures are taken of students in "action" and are placed in our success showcase.
26. Our counselors run special group sessions throughout the year for students who are involved in drugs, whose parents are going through a divorce, who have poor self-concepts, and who are new to the building. These sessions are based on student need.

We feel that these activities have been helpful in developing a cooperative student body and a positive school environment. As a result, last year only 33 student suspensions were invoked. The retention rate has been reduced to four students. The Building Team serviced approximately 125 students who were having academic or social

problems. Our daily student attendance rate was 93.5% and over 65% (400 students) were involved in after-school activities.

However, we still have some concerns that need to be addressed. Our student incentive program needed to be revamped to include more students as winners. Resolving major discipline problems using another method besides suspension has to be in place. A drug education program with reduced suspension time was instituted last year, but our suspension list was still too high. Negative feelings among some staff members exist concerning our Teacher Advisor Groups (T.A.G.). A few teachers do not feel comfortable in this role yet. We are making a concerted effort to correct these issues in order to provide at least one success experience for every student in our school.

As an administrator it is important to model the behavior expected, create a standard for it, program for it, focus on it, talk about it, and most importantly, be willing to take the necessary risks to improve.